

David Griffith, the Forgotten Arlington Patriot

BY WILLARD J. WEBB

Little remembered today, David Griffith was a Revolutionary War patriot. He served with distinction as a chaplain and surgeon in the Continental Army and then came to the Fairfax Parish to be the minister at Christ Church in Alexandria and lived in the glebe house in present day Arlington. George Washington, his former commander and friend, would be his most prominent parishioner. Griffith farmed his glebe and conducted a school at the glebe house. He included two of Washington's nephews among his students. He played an important role in the organization of the Episcopal Church in both Virginia and the United States and was elected the first bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, although he was never able to serve.

Born in New York City in 1742 of a Welsh father and a New York mother, David Griffith received his early schooling in New York. He then traveled to London to study medicine and received a medical degree in 1762. Returning to New York, he began the practice of medicine and married Hannah Colville of that city. Griffith soon realized that he did not find medicine a satisfying career and decided to become a minister. After studying at Kings College, later Columbia University, he again went to London to be ordained by the Bishop of London in the Church of England.¹ The trip was necessary since there was never a Church of England bishop in all of colonial America.

Upon his return from London, Griffith was sent to Gloucester County, New Jersey, as a missionary by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.² He left New Jersey after only five weeks. He found his salary meager and was "entirely disappointed of the House & Glebe." He feared that it would be impossible to support his family on "so scanty an allowance."³

Like other Church of England ministers in the northern colonies where there was no established church, Griffith looked to Virginia. It was the largest and wealthiest of the thirteen colonies. There the Church of England had been the established church since the start of the colony. The Virginia ministers received a bountiful annual salary of 16,000 pounds of tobacco, the equivalent of 50 pounds sterling, and each parish, by law, provided its minister a glebe of at least 200 acres (though many were much larger) where he could grow his own crops to supplement his living. In addition, the Virginia parishes also had substantial glebe houses for their ministers. With a letter of introduction from several New York ministers, David Griffith came to Virginia in 1771. He stayed

with William Byrd II at Westover for several weeks. He preached twice at the Westover Church and impressed the parishioners, including the Harrisons at nearby Berkeley plantation. Griffith hoped to become the minister of the Westover Parish, but it already had a minister.⁴

With the recommendation of Byrd, David Griffith did become the minister of Shelburne Parish in Loudoun County in 1771,⁵ and he and his family, which now included several small children, moved to Loudoun. Shelburne was a new parish that had been cut off from Cameron Parish in 1770. The Shelburne Parish vestry immediately purchased a 465-acre glebe and built a brick glebe house, one of the largest of the Virginia glebe houses, for Griffith and his family.⁶

The Griffiths arrived in Virginia just when the first rumblings of the Revolution were arising, and David Griffith's sympathies were completely with the colonies. Following the Boston Tea Party in December 1773, the British Parliament instituted repressive measures against the Massachusetts colony, including the sending of troops to Boston. In May 1774, the Virginia House of Burgesses ordered a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer in Virginia to show support for Massachusetts and denounced the coercive Parliamentary acts. Lord Dunmore, the Virginia governor, promptly dissolved the House. The burgesses reassembled the next day, May 27, 1774, at the Raleigh Tavern and adopted a resolution urging the other twelve colonies to join in a boycott of various British goods and calling for a congress of representatives of all the colonies in Philadelphia to coordinate colonial issues.⁷ Ninety burgesses signed the 27 May resolution, including Peyton Randolph, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot Lee, and Thomas Nelson. David Griffith, who happened to be in Williamsburg on church business, joined twenty-one other private citizens in signing the resolution.⁸ Thus from the beginning, Griffith was acquainted with the Virginia patriots.

In December 1775, soon after the British had burned Norfolk, Griffith preached at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg and emphatically set out his support for the revolutionary cause. "The dispute," he said in his sermon:

. . . is whether the king's subjects in America, their lives and property, are at the ABSOLUTE DISPOSAL of the king and his subjects in England, . . . if this be the case, their situation is truly slavish and [the colonists] are justly alarmed for the consequences.⁹

Shortly thereafter, Griffith left Shelburne Parish and entered military service. He served as surgeon with Captain William Grayson's Prince William County Battalion stationed in Williamsburg.¹⁰ While with that unit, he went with a party that rowed out to the British man-of-war *Roebuck* anchored in the



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Shelburne Parish Glebe House. The center two-story portion was built 1772-1773 for Griffith and his family while he was minister of the parish.

York River where Governor Dunmore had taken refuge when he fled from Williamsburg. The party attempted to resolve the differences between the governor and the colony, but it had no success.¹¹

On February 28, 1776, David Griffith became the chaplain and surgeon of the 3d Virginia Regiment in the Continental Line where he would serve for the remainder of his service in the Revolution.¹² During the early months of 1776, the 3d Virginia trained in the Williamsburg area. Then in August, following the Declaration of Independence, it moved north to New York¹³ where it suffered heavy losses (60 killed) in the disastrous Battle of Long Island. A year later, the 3d Virginia was in the fierce and bloody Battle of Brandywine. The Continental army suffered losses of over 1,000 men and was pushed back by the advancing British General Howe.¹⁴ Although Griffith's work caring for and ministering to the dying and wounded must have been arduous and heart-rending, he was not discouraged. He wrote to his wife several days after the battle:

Fame will have informed you by this time that we have had a battle. Though unfortunate, it will, by no means, be so ruinous as report & the tongues of the Tories will make it. We were repulsed & lost the ground but our enemy purchased it dearly. .

. . . Our Regt. suffered more than any in the Line & acquired greater glory. We lost upwards to forty men killed and wounded.¹⁵

Then came the agonizing winter of 1777-1778 with the 3d Virginia in winter quarters with the Continental Army at Valley Forge. Cold, disease, and hunger brought great suffering to the troops and many deserted. Here David Griffith cared for the sick and became well acquainted with George Washington. He was able to have a brief visit with his family who had remained in Loudoun.¹⁶

Spring brought a great improvement. Fresh recruits arrived and General Baron von Steuben instilled discipline and tactical skills in the Continental forces, and Washington and the Continental Army took the offensive. Sir Henry Clinton, who had succeeded General Howe, withdrew from Philadelphia and moved across New Jersey toward New York. Washington and his army followed and gave battle at Monmouth. During the course of the battle, Washington's second-in-command, General Charles Lee, ordered a retreat of his forces at a critical point when it seemed unwarranted. Washington personally took command and rallied the army. After an intense day-long battle, Clinton withdrew and the Continental forces had proved themselves equal to the British regulars.¹⁷

Many years after this battle, George Washington Parke Custis wrote of the Lee incident and told of the involvement of David Griffith in a chapter of his *Memoirs of George Washington*, which he entitled "Mysteries of the Revolution." Custis related that, late the night before the Battle of Monmouth, Griffith arrived at Washington's headquarters and warned Washington "against the conduct of Major-General Lee in to-morrow's battle."¹⁸ The Lee incident is well substantiated, but no other documentation has been found to confirm this strange story about Griffith. How did Custis, who had not been born at the time of the Battle of Monmouth, learn of this story concerning Griffith? Did George Washington relate it to him in later years? We shall, perhaps, never know.

During the summer of 1778, Washington moved his troops to New York along the Hudson just above New York City. There in September an American unit with 104 horsemen under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Baylor was ambushed by the British. Many of the Americans were killed and wounded. Baylor and forty of his wounded men were taken prisoner. In a magnanimous act, the British commander, General Lord Cornwallis, allowed David Griffith to cross the British lines to treat Baylor and the other wounded Americans. Cornwallis ordered that "Mr. Griffith a Surgeon belonging to General Washington's Army, shall not be made prisoner, nor Molested in any manner by any of His Majesty's Troops during his attendance on Colonel Baylor and the rest of the Wounded of his Corps . . ." The following day, in a further act of

kindness, Cornwallis sent Griffith “a few Lemons that were got by accident” for the use of Colonel Baylor.¹⁹

Throughout his military service, David Griffith was continually concerned for the welfare of his wife and small children and missed them terribly as his letters frequently indicated. In July 1776, he wrote:

Dearest Hanny, the anxiety and uneasiness I suffer at being separated from you & our Dear little flock is excessive, & were it not for the sense of Duty which actuates me—Duty to my Country & A Duty to my Family, it would be unsupportable; but for these, the fatigue I endure & the Sacrifice which I make of Domestic ease and the endearments of our happy Connubial State, I am determined to endure²⁰

In December of that year, he wrote again: “I long much to see you my Dearest Hannah—to know how you go on”²¹ He wrote in November 1777:

Be assured my Dearest Hanny, that you and my Dearest Children are the Grand Objects of my cares, and tho’ the affairs of my Country and the occupations in which I am here engaged engross very much of my thoughts, yet they are much employed on the Dearest Objects I have left behind me.

Just a week later, he wrote Hannah:

Tell Our Dear Children that I long to see them. I have a thousand things to say to them and long for an opportunity to gratify myself in a little chit-chat with the Dearest Creatures. It is a matter of concern to me I do assure that it is not in my Power to bring them some little Article of Dress or some toys to amuse them.²²

In the fall of 1778, he wrote in a similar vein to Hannah:

The season is approaching, my Dearest Love, that I hope will soon send the army into winter quarters and me into your arms. Believe me, my Hanny, I long, ardently for that time. . . . Tell my Sweet Babes how I love them and long to see them—imprint ten thousand kisses on their sweet lips for me.²³

Perhaps because of concern for his family, David Griffith decided to leave military service. In the fall of 1778, he received a letter from Captain Richard Conway, a vestryman of the Fairfax Parish, inviting him to be the minister of the parish. It was a large and prosperous parish, and in writing to Hannah about the

invitation, Griffith told her the parish had “a very fine Glebe” and that he would prefer it to “most places I know in Virginia.”²⁴ Obviously, the chance to be reunited with his wife and family and the prospect of a good glebe proved too tempting to resist. Griffith left the Continental Army in March 1779 and he and his family took up residence in the glebe house of Fairfax parish in what is now Arlington.²⁵

David Griffith was proud of his Revolutionary War service, and shortly after the conflict he joined the Society of the Cincinnati, a patriotic organization of revolutionary army officers.²⁶ During the spring of 1783, a group of officers led by Baron von Steuben and Generals Henry Knox and Horatio Gates organized the Society, and George Washington became the President General. The Society adopted an Institution, a statement of principles, which charged the Society to “preserve inviolate those exalted rights and liberties of human nature, for which they have fought and bled. . . .” The Institution provided for societies in all thirteen of the states.²⁷ Brigadier General Muhlenberg organized the Virginia Society of the Cincinnati at a meeting in Fredericksburg in October 1783. David Griffith did not attend that meeting, but he did travel to Fredericksburg on July 4, 1785 for a meeting of the Virginia Society. Although not enough members attended “to constitute a Meeting,” Griffith did join the Society and was recorded as an “original” member.²⁸

The Fairfax Parish to which David Griffith came in 1779 was a relatively new parish. It had been cut off from Truro Parish in 1764 and included the area between Little Hunting Creek, the Potomac and the mountains. It had two churches, Christ Church in Alexandria and the Falls Church, though the latter had been virtually abandoned by the time Griffith arrived in the parish. The new vestry had selected Townsend Dade as the first minister and purchased a glebe of four hundred and some odd acres midway between the two churches. In the years 1773-1775, the vestry had built a commodious story-and-a-half, brick glebe house with appropriate outbuildings.²⁹

Reverend Dade moved into the new glebe house, but did not remain long. He and the vestry soon had a disagreement,³⁰ and he resigned his ministry and relinquished the house in 1778. The vestry then in September 1778 selected the Reverend William West to be the minister, but it seems doubtful that he ever served or lived in the glebe house, for at a meeting on February 17, 1779, the Fairfax Parish Vestry accepted Mr. West’s resignation and unanimously approved David Griffith as the minister, instructing the church wardens to put him in possession of the parish glebe.³¹

Precisely when David Griffith arrived in the Fairfax Parish cannot be determined. He resigned from the Continental Army on March 18, 1779.³² His wife and small children had remained in Loudoun County while Griffith was away in the army. Entries in David Griffith’s account book show a gap between February

10 and May 22, 1779³³ and it would seem that he moved his family to the Fairfax Glebe during this period. During the 1770s and 1780s, the Fairfax Parish Vestry met infrequently, usually only twice a year and sometimes not even that often, and Griffith did not attend his first vestry in the parish until June 27, 1780.³⁴ Several months earlier, in February 1780, the Griffiths' third son and fourth child, Colvin, was born. Four more children would join the family in the following years.³⁵

Throughout his life David Griffith kept an account book. His father had begun it for him in 1749, when David was only seven, and Griffith continued it for the rest of his life, recording in chronological order both income received and expenditures. But what would appear to be an invaluable source about Griffith's life and activities proves disappointing. For while Griffith carefully listed amounts and dates, he only occasionally indicated the source of the incomes or the nature of the expenditures, and the portion of the book covering the years at the Fairfax Parish is much more sketchy and incomplete than the earlier part of the book.³⁶ Nonetheless, one can glean something about Griffith's activities in the Fairfax Parish from the book.

Griffith immediately turned to farming when he arrived at the Fairfax Parish Glebe. He had been a diligent farmer at Shelburne in the years just before the war, and his account book shows expenditures for plowing, sowing and making fences and the sale of corn. In the fall of 1779, he purchased 14 bushels of wheat and 20 bushels of rye obviously for fall planting. Then, in February 1780, he sold 905 pounds of tobacco to Bryan Fairfax in Alexandria. It would seem doubtful that Griffith could have planted a crop of tobacco after his arrival at the glebe since tobacco had to be started early in the spring but, perhaps, an overseer had planted the tobacco. Griffith did have an overseer at the glebe for the last entry in the account book was a payment by Hannah Griffith in September 1789, four months after Griffith's death, in a final reckoning for all accounts with the overseer. The account book shows no further sales of tobacco, but by this time, planters in Virginia were turning away from tobacco cultivation in favor of grains, and the hilly land of the glebe would not have been as suitable for tobacco as the broad fields of the tidewater.

Griffith did continue to raise grain, and his account book again records a purchase of 14 bushels of wheat in early 1784, probably for spring planting.

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Fairfax Parish Glebe House, before the 2005-2006 renovation. The glebe house that Griffith lived in burned in 1795. The surviving house today is a 19th century rebuilding with additions. Only a few fragments of brickwork in the basement walls survive from the original house.

Griffith also raised livestock at the glebe. In July 1785, he sold 34 hogs and five months later 13 sows, 10 barrows (castrated pigs), and one boar. Later, in 1787, the account book shows the purchase of a “grey mare” for two pounds, eight shillings.³⁷ The farming of the glebe did not provide a bountiful living for Griffith

and his family. In a letter of November 1788, he commented to a friend: "My present dependence for the support of a large family is my Glebe, which, tho' extensive, is but poor land and requires close attention to procure from it a sufficiency of necessaries."³⁸

The matter of Griffith's salary as the minister of Fairfax Parish posed a problem. Before the Revolution, an annual parish levy on all land owners had provided a regular and ample income, allowing the parishes of the established church to pay the ministers, build churches, purchase glebes and build glebe houses. But, in 1776, in the first step in disestablishing the church, the new Virginia General Assembly had stripped the vestries of all authority to levy the parishes except for support of the poor, orphans, and widows. Now the parishes no longer had an assured source of income to pay the ministers. When Griffith came to Fairfax Parish, a group of prominent parishioners agreed to pay an annual subscription to provide for his salary.³⁹ Later, when he returned to Mount Vernon after the end of the Revolution, George Washington became one of these subscribers.⁴⁰

Griffith received some salary payments in tobacco, which had been the medium of exchange in Virginia before the Revolution.⁴¹ He also received additional income in the form of payments for marriages, baptisms, and funerals. The account book shows that Griffith received payment for services in the amounts of 75 pounds, 15 shillings; 38 pounds, 9 shillings; and 26 pounds, 5 shillings in the years 1782, 1783, and 1784, respectively, though there is no indication of what specific services he supplied. Nor does the account book show any similar payments during the other years that Griffith was at the glebe.⁴²

For an additional source of income, David Griffith took into the glebe house for board and education several boys each year. He had done this at Shelburne Parish and continued the practice at the Fairfax Parish. In 1784, his students included George Steptoe Washington and Lawrence Augustine Washington, the sons of George Washington's deceased younger brother Samuel. Griffith's account book shows several payments during that year for "washing" (laundry) for the Washington boys.⁴³ On July 12, 1784, Griffith wrote to George Washington to inform him that his nephews had been "badly supply'd" with clothing when they had arrived with him. But the boys' guardian, James Nourse, Griffith related, had instructed him to furnish them with "clothing and every necessary without any restrictions," and he was happy to report that the nephews had "a sufficiency of clothing for growing boys & . . . in that respect, they are much better off than any of the young Gentlemen who are with me."⁴⁴

David Griffith and George Washington had become well acquainted during Griffith's service with the Continental Army, especially during the hard winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge, and with Washington's return to Mount

Vernon in 1783, the two men resumed their friendship. Griffith was a frequent visitor at Mount Vernon, coming to dinner and staying the night. Washington's diaries record ten such visits by Griffith in the years 1784-1788.⁴⁵ One of those visits in September 1785 was to attend the marriage of Washington's nephew, George Augustine Washington, to Fanny Bassett, a niece of Martha Washington. There is no indication, however, that Washington ever returned the visits or stayed with Griffith at his glebe house. The two did share interests in farming and gardening. In February 1786, Washington bought "a Goose & Gander of the Chinese breed of Geese" from Griffith, and on one visit to Mount Vernon, Griffith brought Washington "two of the large white (or Portugal) Peach trees and 2 Scions from a tree growing in his garden, to which he [Griffith] could give no name—the last for my shrubberies."⁴⁶

Griffith had also come to know Lafayette during the Revolution, and when Lafayette visited George Washington in August 1784,⁴⁷ Griffith dined with him and the Washingtons at Mount Vernon. Since there is no George Washington diary for August 1784, the exact date of the dinner is not recorded, but in a letter to Griffith some two years later, Lafayette recalled their conversation at Mount Vernon.⁴⁸ During the same visit Washington and Lafayette honored the "Gentlemen" of Alexandria with a dinner at Lomax's Tavern.⁴⁹ The names of the attendees were not recorded, but Griffith was almost certainly among them. Later, in a letter to Washington in October 1786, Lafayette asked that his "Affectionate Compliments" be paid to "doctor Griffith."⁵⁰

Griffith was always short of money and quite dependent upon the annual subscriptions⁵¹ of his parishioners for his salary. These payments were sometimes late and not always sufficient for his needs. Once when Griffith sought a loan for five hundred pounds, George Washington wrote a letter of recommendation for him. "From a long & intimate acquaintance with Mr. Griffith," Washington wrote, "I have a high opinion of his worth, and entire dependence on his representations . . ."⁵² Even Washington proved delinquent in his subscription payments and Griffith had to appeal to him several times for his money. In April 1787, he wrote from the glebe stating:

Being under the necessity of immediately discharging some claims against me, I am obliged to call upon my friends for their subscriptions to enable me to avoid a threatenng difficulty—My Son waits on you for yours due for the last year, and you will oblige me greatly in discharging it.⁵³

In March the following year, Griffith again sent his son to Mount Vernon with a letter requesting Washington for his payment though there is no indication that the son came away with it.⁵⁴ Eight months later, in November 1788,

Griffith sent yet another plaintive letter. "Being much in want of Money to furnish my family with the necessary Winter clothing," he requested the payment of the subscription "which was due on the 1st day of August last."⁵⁵

David Griffith occupied himself during much of his time as minister of the Fairfax Parish with the organization of the new Episcopal Church in Virginia and in the United States. The final demise of the established church in Virginia came in 1784. In that year, the Virginia General Assembly stripped the old established church of its last remaining remnant of authority. It removed the authority of the vestries to levy the parishes for support of the poor and provided for overseers of the poor in each county to take over that responsibility.⁵⁶ Now the former established Church of England became the Protestant Episcopal Church of Virginia, a denomination just like the former dissenting denominations—the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Mennonites.

The problem was that that the new Episcopal Church had no organizational structure. During the colonial period, the established church in Virginia had come under the authority of the Bishop of London, but the bishop had never come to Virginia. The individual parishes with their ministers and vestries were the only structure of the church. The new Episcopal Church not only in Virginia, but in the other states as well, now had no bishops or any other organization to deal with church matters beyond the parish level.

Even before the final disestablishment, David Griffith had recognized the problems for the emerging new church. In the fall of 1783, he wrote a friend and fellow minister in Richmond urging "some well-regulated plan" to prevent the ruin of the church. He recommended a convention of the Virginia clergy in Richmond during the following spring to consider the "important business of regulating the affairs of the Church,"⁵⁷ Griffith's suggestion was taken up and a convention of the clergy met for several days in Richmond in June 1784. David Griffith, of course, attended, but no record of the proceedings survives. The only resulting action was a petition to the Virginia General Assembly for the right of the Episcopal Church to incorporate and regulate its spiritual concerns.⁵⁸

Meantime, Griffith had been in correspondence with ministers in other states concerning the need for organization of the Episcopal Church in the United States with a convention of clergy from all the states. An initial meeting did occur in New York in October 1784 with Griffith attending as an unofficial observer from Virginia. The meeting adopted a call for a general convention the following year in Philadelphia.⁵⁹ At another convention of the Virginia Episcopal Church in Richmond in June 1785, David Griffith was elected one of the two clerical deputies to attend the general convention in Philadelphia in the coming September. He did attend the September meeting and was elected secretary. This first General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted a constitution for the church and re-

vised the prayer book. One of its final actions was a motion thanking Griffith for “his ability and diligence in the discharge of his duty as Secretary.”⁶⁰

In May 1786, a convention of the Virginia Episcopal Church met again in Richmond and David Griffith was elected bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Virginia. He received thirty-two votes while two other candidates garnered ten and seven votes, respectively. Since there were still no bishops in the United States, Griffith needed to travel to England for consecration, and the convention called upon the Virginia vestries to collect funds to pay Griffith’s expenses for the trip.⁶¹

A month later, Bishop-elect Griffith traveled again to Philadelphia to attend the second General Convention of the Episcopal Church, where he was elected president. That year the convention accomplished little of substance,⁶² but after its close, the University of Pennsylvania conferred a doctor of divinity degree on David Griffith.⁶³ Later, in December of that year, Lafayette wrote from Paris to congratulate Griffith on his election as bishop, remembering their meeting and conversations at Mount Vernon. “I have ever Been, and shall ever be,” Lafayette wrote, “Your sincere friend and Admirer,” and invited Griffith to visit him in Paris when he traveled to England for consecration.⁶⁴

For the following three years, Griffith attempted, without success, to raise the funds for a trip to England for consecration. He did not have the personal means for it, and those years following the Revolution were a time of economic depression in Virginia. The Fairfax Parish could not raise the money nor did any other Virginia parishes contribute. Although the record does not clearly indicate, it seems that church politics may have been involved. Then as now, there may have been a prejudice against northern Virginia for a faction in Williamsburg apparently did not want Griffith as bishop.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the bishops-elect from Pennsylvania and New York did travel to London for consecration. Since three bishops were needed for the consecration ceremony, even the return home of the two new bishops did not make Griffith’s consecration possible in the United States.⁶⁶

Obviously discouraged, David Griffith went to Philadelphia in late July 1789 to attend the General Convention. After a brief illness, he died on the morning of August 3 at the early age of forty-seven in the home of his close friend William White, the new bishop of Pennsylvania. After an elaborate funeral, with a procession of all the members of the Convention as well as the clergy of the other denominations of the city, Griffith was buried in the yard of Christ Church, Philadelphia.⁶⁷ In an obituary several days later, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* praised him:

This Gentleman had filled various departments, as well civil as religious, and in all had conducted himself with such decency of deportment and strict attention to duty, as will embalm his

memory with his friends, and, when grief shall begin to yield to reflection, will furnish most effectual and most lasting consolation to his family.⁶⁸

David Griffith died without a will and leaving various debts. Griffith had received over 6,000 acres of land in what would become Kentucky in 1783 as a bounty grant for his service in the Revolutionary army. That was the amount of land awarded officers of lieutenant colonel rank. There is no record that he ever visited this land or made any attempt to use or sell it. In 1791, the Virginia General Assembly passed a special law for the appointment of trustees to sell these bounty lands and allow Hannah Griffith to settle the outstanding debts.⁶⁹

David Griffith's death did end the Griffith family's association with the Fairfax Parish Glebe House. In March 1790, Bryan Fairfax succeeded Griffith as the minister of the Fairfax Parish,⁷⁰ but Fairfax did not move into the glebe house, choosing to live in his own house, Mount Eagle, located below Alexandria City. Fairfax's daughter Elizabeth had married David Griffith, Jr., and Bryan Fairfax allowed the young couple to live in the glebe house. When Fairfax resigned as minister in 1792, the Griffith couple vacated the house, which fire destroyed three years later.⁷¹

David Griffith was an ardent patriot. During the Revolution he not only ministered to the spiritual needs of the Continental Army, but he also treated



Courtesy of Christ Church, Philadelphia
Stained glass window representation of the first general convention of the Episcopal Church in September 1785. David Griffith who served as secretary is the fourth from the right (in profile).

the sick, wounded, and dying. After the war, while the minister at the Fairfax Parish, he took the lead in organizing the Episcopal Church in both Virginia and the United States. Yet today, he is completely forgotten and receives no recognition for either role. No chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) bears his name to honor his Revolutionary service. A historic marker on North 17th Street in front of the Glebe House names prominent persons who have lived in the house, including Bryan Fairfax, Eighth Lord Fairfax; Peter Van Ness, the Mayor of Washington; Clark Mills, the sculptor (who probably never lived in the house); Caleb Cushing, the first US minister to China; and State Senator Frank Ball. But Griffith's name does not appear, and his grave in the yard of Christ Church in Philadelphia is unmarked and lost.

During the Nineteenth Century, the Christ Church in Philadelphia installed a series of stained glass windows commemorating key events in the history of the church. One portrayed the first general convention held in 1785, where the basic organization and structure of the Episcopal Church was adopted. David Griffith represented Virginia at that convention and served as the secretary, and he is depicted in the window. Since the window was done many years after Griffith's death, his likeness can only have been representational rather than an actual portrait. Then, during the 1980's, Christ Church removed the windows for cleaning and restoration. During the process, it was decided that these Victorian stained glass windows were inappropriate for an 18th century church building and they were placed in storage. Plans call for the windows to be reinstalled in the church's Neighborhood House, but funds have never been found for the project. So this one recognition of David Griffith's service is now also lost to the public.

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End Notes

¹ "Griffith, Chaplain David," biographical sketch in Virginius Dabney, *Bicentennial History and Roster of the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Virginia, 1783-1983* (Society of the Cincinnati, 1983), p. 160.

² The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was a Church of England missionary organization for the spread of the Church of England in the American colonies where there was not an established church.

³ "Griffith, Chaplain David," in *Bicentennial History and Roster*; ltr, Griffith to S.P.G., February 8, 1771, in

G. MacLaren Brydon, "David Griffith, 1742-1789, First Bishop-Elect of Virginia," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. ix, 1940, pp. 196-198.

⁴ Ltr of Introduction, October 8, 1771, Griffith papers, manuscript collections, Virginia Historical Society; ltr, William Byrd II to Richard Peters, January 6, 1772, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. xxxviii, 1930, pp. 354-355.

⁵ *Shelburne Parish, Loudoun County, Vestry Book*, Vestry Meeting Notes, December 23, 1771, microfilm, Library of Virginia.

⁶ For the construction of the Shelburne Glebe House and a description, see Willard J. and Anne C. Webb, *The Glebe Houses of Colonial Virginia* (Heritage Books, Inc., 2003), pp. 82-88.

⁷ Emily J. Salmon and Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr., eds., *The Hornbook of Virginia History* (Library of Virginia, 1994), p. 27.

⁸ Resolution, May 27, 1774, in *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1776*, John P. Kennedy, ed. (Virginia State Library, 1905), Vol. xiii, pp. xii-xiv.

⁹ David Griffith, sermon, "Passive Obedience Considered." preached in Williamsburg, December 31, 1775, microfiche, Library of Virginia.

¹⁰ John H. Gwathmy, *Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution* (Dietz Press, 1938), p. 328. The date Griffith joined the Prince William unit cannot be determined, but in February 1776, the Committee of Safety authorized two months' pay for him in that unit. Journal of the Cmte of Safety of Virginia, February 24, 1776, in *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and other Manuscripts*, H.W. Fournoy, ed. (Virginia State Library, 1890), Vol. viii, p. 97.

¹¹ Ltr, Levin Powell to Sarah Powell, February 24, 1776, in Robert C. Powell, *Biographical Sketch of Col. Levin Powell, Including His Correspondence During the Revolutionary War* (G.H. Ramey & Son. 1877), pp. 17-20.

¹² Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the Revolution, April 1775 to December 1783* (Genealogical Publishing Co, 1967), p. 263; Journal of the Cmte of Safety for Virginia, 5 March, 1776, in *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, Vol. viii, p. 107.

¹³ Ltr, Griffith to Levin Powell, August 5, 1776, in Powell, *Biographical Sketch of Levin Powell*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁴ Charles Campbell, *History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia* (Lippincott & Co., 1860), pp. 667-668, 685. R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History* (Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 712, 715.

¹⁵ Ltr, Griffith to Hannah Griffith, September 14, 1777, Griffith papers.

¹⁶ Ltr, Griffith to Hannah Griffith, December 11, 1777, Griffith papers.

¹⁷ Dupuy and Dupuy, *Encyclopedia of Military History*, p. 716.

¹⁸ Mary Custis Lee, *Memoirs of Washington by His Adopted Son, George Washington Parke Custis, with a Memoir of the Author by his Daughter and Illustrative and Explanatory Notes by Benson J. Lossing* (Union Publishing House, 1859), pp. 289-291.

¹⁹ Griffith, "Report . . . Concerning A Night Surprise Attack Made by British Forces Upon Colonel Baylor's Regiment . . . , September 27, 1778," October 28, 1778, Griffith papers; Orders, Lt. Gen'l Earl Cornwallis, 30 September and October 1, 1778, quoted in full in G. MacLaren Brydon, "David Griffith, Bishop-Elect of Virginia," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. ix, 1940, p. 209.

²⁰ Ltr, Griffith to Hannah Griffith, July 2, 1776, Griffith papers.

²¹ Ltr, Griffith to Hannah Griffith, December 8, 1776, Griffith papers.

²² Ltrs, Griffith to Hannah Griffith, November 6 and November 13, 1777, Griffith papers.

²³ Ltr, Griffith to Hannah Griffith, November 1778, Griffith papers.

²⁴ Ltr, Griffith to Hannah Griffith, September 23, 1778, Griffith papers.

²⁵ Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army*, p. 263. *Fairfax Parish Vestry Book, 1765-1928*, Vestry Meeting, February 28, 1778, microfilm, Alexandria Library (hereafter *Vestry Book*).

²⁶ Virginius Dabney, *Bicentennial History and Roster of the Society of the Cincinnati*, p. 160.

²⁷ Minor Myers, Jr., *Liberty without Anarchy: A History of the Society of the Cincinnati* (University of Virginia Press, 1983), pp. 24-27.

²⁸ Edgar E. Hume, ed., *Papers of the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Virginia* (Society of the Cincinnati, 1938), pp. 14-15.

²⁹ Webb and Webb, *Glebe Houses of Colonial Virginia*, p. 59.

- ³⁰ Vestry records do not reveal the nature of the disagreement.
- ³¹ *Vestry Book*, Vestry Meetings, September 28, 1778, and February 17, 1779.
- ³² Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army*, p. 263.
- ³³ David Griffith, *Account Book, 1749-1789*, Griffith papers, manuscript collections, Virginia Historical Society (hereafter *Account Book*).
- ³⁴ *Vestry Book*, Vestry Meeting, June 27, 1780.
- ³⁵ William Sydnor, "Doctor Griffith of Virginia: Emergence of a Church Leader, March 1779-June 3, 1786," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. xlv, 1976, p. 5.
- ³⁶ *Account Book*.
- ³⁷ *Account Book, 1773-1774, 1779-1789*.
- ³⁸ Ltr, Griffith to William White, November 27, 1788, in William Sydnor, "Doctor Griffith of Virginia: The Breaking of a Church Leader, September 1786-August 3, 1789," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Church*, Vol. xlv, 1976, pp. 134-136.
- ³⁹ Ltr, Griffith to Hannah Griffith, September 23, 1778, Griffith papers; note, W.W. Abbot, ed., *The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series* (University Press of Virginia, 1997), vol. 6, p. 185.
- ⁴⁰ Mount Vernon was in Truro Parish and George Washington was a vestryman in that parish. Following the Revolution, Truro Parish with its Pohick Church was abandoned, and George Washington began regularly attending Chirst Church in Alexandria.
- ⁴¹ *Vestry Book*, Vestry Meetings, October 23, 1780, and November 22, 1784; *Account Book, 1782-1783, 1785*.
- ⁴² *Account Book, 1782, 1783, 1784*.
- ⁴³ *Account Book, 1784*.
- ⁴⁴ Ltr, Griffith to George Washington, July 12, 1784, *Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, Vol. 2, pp. 499-500.
- ⁴⁵ Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Diaries of George Washington* (University Press of Virginia, 1978), Vol. 4, (1784-June 1786), pp. 76, 128, 206-207, 220-221, 272; Vol. 5, (July 1786-December 1789), pp. 98-99, 108-109, 117, 192, 249, 351 (hereafter *George Washington Diaries*).
- ⁴⁶ *George Washington Diaries*, Vol. 4, pp. 272, 274.
- ⁴⁷ *Virginia Journal and Alexandria Gazette*, August 19, 1784, p. 2; Ltr, Lafayette to Geo. Washington, August 10, 1783, *Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, Vol. 2, pp. 28-29.
- ⁴⁸ Ltr, Lafayette to Griffith, December 26, 1786, in Brydon, "David Griffith, Bishop-Elect of Virginia," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. ix, 1940, p. 230.
- ⁴⁹ *Virginia Journal and Alexandria Gazette*, August 26, 1784, p. 3.
- ⁵⁰ Ltr, Lafayette to Washington, October 26, 1786, *Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, Vol. 4, pp. 311-313.
- ⁵¹ In 1785, the annual subscriptions were replaced by an annual pew rent from prominent parishioners, including George Washington, for the support of the minister and the church, though in actual practice there was no change in the way Griffith received his salary. See Note, *Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, Vol. 6, p. 185.
- ⁵² Ltr, Washington to Samuel Powell, April 5, 1786, *Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, Vol. 4, p. 5.
- ⁵³ Ltr, Griffith to Washington, April 26, 1787, *Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, Vol. 5, p. 156.
- ⁵⁴ Ltr, Griffith to Washington, March 31, 1788, *Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series*, Vol. 6, p. 185; *Diaries of George Washington*, Vol. 5, p. 293.
- ⁵⁵ Ltr, Griffith to Washington, November 3, 1788, *Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, Vol. 1, pp. 89-90.
- ⁵⁶ William W. Henning, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619* (University Press of Virginia, facsimile reprint, 1969, originally published 1823), Vol. xi, pp. 532-537. The law allowed the parishes to retain their churches, glebe lands, and glebe houses.
- ⁵⁷ Ltr, Griffith to Rev. John Buchanan, Fall 1783, in William Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia* (Lippincott & Co., 1857), Vol. ii, pp. 264-265.
- ⁵⁸ William S. Perry, *The History of the American Episcopal Church, 1587-1883* (Osgood & Co., 1885),

pp. 136-137; Petition, Virginia Episcopal Church Convention to Virginia House of Delegates, June 3, 1784, in Brydon, "David Griffith, Bishop-Elect of Virginia," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. ix, 1940, pp. 215-217.

⁵⁹ Perry, *History of the American Episcopal Church*, 26-32.

⁶⁰ Journal, Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church (PEC), September 27-October 7, 1785, in F.L. Hawks and W.S. Perry, eds., *Journals of the General Conventions of the Protestant Episcopal Church (PEC) in the USA* (J.W. Royner, 1861), Vol. i, pp. 13-29.

⁶¹ Perry, *History of the American Episcopal Church*, pp. 138-139.

⁶² Jrl, Convention of PEC, 2-20 June 1786, *Jrls of General Conventions of the PEC*, Vol. i, pp. 31-46.

⁶³ G. McLaren Brydon, "The Clergy of the Established Church in Virginia and the Revolution," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. xli, 1933, p. 140.

⁶⁴ Ltr, Lafayette to Griffith, December 26, 1786, in Brydon, "David Griffith, Bishop-Elect of Virginia," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. ix, 1940, p. 230.

⁶⁵ See ltrs, Griffith to William White, October 20, 1786 and May 27, 1787, in G. MacLaren Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church and the Political Conditions Under Which It Grew* (Virginia Historical Soc., 1947), Vol. ii, pp. 465-467.

⁶⁶ In 1790, James Madison, the president of the College of William and Mary and cousin of the future president, was elected bishop of Virginia and the Virginia Convention voted him 200 pounds for his expenses, but Madison, too, was unable to collect this money and used his own resources to travel to London. He was consecrated and did become Bishop of Virginia. Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers, and Families*, Vol. ii, pp. 267-268.

⁶⁷ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 12, 1789, p. 3; Jrl, Convention of the PEC, July 28-August 8, 1789, *Jrls of General Conventions of the PEC*, Vol. i, p. 61-79.

⁶⁸ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 12, 1789, p. 3. No obituary for Griffith appeared in the *Alexandria Gazette*.

⁶⁹ Lloyd D. Bockstruck, *Revolutionary War Bounty Land Grants* (Genealogical Publishing Co., 1996), pp. xxii-xxiii, 215; Henning, Vol. xiii, pp. 311-313; Misc. land grant documents and plat, Griffith papers.

⁷⁰ *Vestry Book*, Vestry Meeting, March 15, 1790.

⁷¹ Kenton Kilmer and Donald Sweig, *The Fairfax Family in Fairfax County* (Fairfax Cty. Off. of Comprehensive Planning, 1975), pp. 39-42; *The Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, November 21, 1795, p. 3.